

Rameau's Treatment of Suspension

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In the *Code de musique pratique* (1760), Rameau presents a description of suspensions which is in marked contrast to his approach in the *Traité de l'harmonie* (1722), thirty-eight years earlier. Rameau's theories were controversial to generations of theorists, many of whom did not know the *Code de musique pratique*. A knowledge of the *Code* is essential to an understanding of Rameau's theories. Yet, today the treatise remains untranslated into English. It is the intent of this article to demonstrate that Rameau did not actually change his theories, but merely presented them in a different way, based on the particular context of the treatise. As an aid to the reader, various excerpts of the *Code* which deal with suspensions are presented here in an English translation, for the first time.¹

In the *Traité*, the harmonic point of view dominates, with an

¹My personal thanks to Paul Doguereau and Esther Ratner, for their assistance in compiling the translations included in this article. I am indebted to a seminar given by Allan Keiler at Brandeis University.

attempt to understand causes; in the *Code*, however, Rameau is emphasizing the melodic perspective, and a more descriptive approach to the surface of the music. Despite the fact that both points of view are present in both treatises, a tension is created between the two perspectives that reaches its moment of greatest stress in Rameau's distinction between *supposition* and *suspension*, where blurred lines between the two result in inconsistent applications to the musical surface.

Rameau's approach to suspension in the *Code* is different from that presented in the *Traité*, causing writers such as Matthew Shirlaw and David Beach to interpret the difference as a shift in his theoretical views. In discussing Rameau's treatment of suspension in the *Code*, Shirlaw writes: "There can be little doubt but that Rameau's theory, in respect of these chords, undergoes a change for the better; but he does not observe that he completely demolishes his own theory of Supposition...."² David Beach writes:

In the *Code de musique pratique* which appeared almost forty years after the *Traité de l'harmonie*, Rameau considered for the first time the melodic phenomenon of suspension, something he had avoided in past writings because it was inconsistent with his premise that melody originates in harmony. At one point, he even conceded that "a tonic can remain as a six-four over its dominant in the form of suspension." This is a drastic departure from his original idea that all six-four chords are consonant.³

Does the difference in the approach to suspensions actually represent a change in the theories of Rameau? When we consider the two treatises in their context, we see that Rameau, rather than actually

²Matthew Shirlaw, *The Theory of Harmony*, 2nd ed. (Dekalb, IL: B. Coar, 1955), 257-58.

³David Beach, "Function of the Six-Four Chord," *Journal of Music Theory* 11 (1967): 4.

altering his theory of harmony, was merely emphasizing different facets of a musical phenomenon in the two treatises. In his *Traité*, Rameau, seeking an origin for melodic phenomena in mathematics, in acoustics, and in the tradition of theorists like Zarlino, attempts a "causal" explanation. The chapters in the *Code* where suspensions are presented, however, are intended as a "practical" manual for keyboard players; the emphasis is not to explain causes, but rather to describe practically what is happening on the musical surface, in a manner which will aid performers.

An analogy to the treatment of suspensions in the two treatises is "depth-of-field" in photography: it is possible to focus on either background or foreground, depending on what suits the needs of the photographer. This does not imply that one of the two aspects is not found in the photograph; rather, only that its significance has been either reduced or augmented, depending on the desire of the photographer. Likewise, the de-emphasis of melodic phenomena in the *Traité* does not necessarily indicate that Rameau did not understand suspensions (which would be unlikely for a theorist who was so well-grounded in the figured bass theory of the period), or that he radically altered his theories.

Rameau's discussion of suspensions in the *Traité* is very limited. In Book III, Chapter 31, "On the Eleventh Chord, called the Fourth," Rameau, in discussing the eleventh chord writes:

We are speaking here of the complete eleventh chord. Its great harshness, however, often obliges us to suppress most of its sounds, thus conforming to the type of eleventh chord discussed in Chapter 15, which for that reason we called heteroclite.⁴ This change makes the chord much more tolerable. Thus, it is used only rarely in its entirety,

⁴Rameau describes "heteroclite" as follows: "This new sound consequently forms an eleventh and not a fourth with the seventh of the fundamental [bass]. We may thus call this chord *heteroclite*, since it is not divided as are the other chords and, besides, it follows the properties of chords by supposition which cannot be inverted." Rameau, *Treatise on Harmony*, trans. Philip Gossett (New York: Dover, 1971), 89-90.

describing it as an eleventh chord is the basso continuo, with the bass by supposition a fifth below the fundamental bass. Yet, the melodic dimension is also not overlooked in Rameau's description; in fact, it is an alternative point of view when Rameau notes that the eleventh chord "may sometimes yield pleasant suspensions in both the harmony and melody," and, "Chords by supposition serve only to suspend sounds which should be heard naturally." While the basic framework that Rameau presents is harmonic, in keeping with his premise that "Melody arises from harmony,"⁷ he also does not fail to recognize the melodic dimension.

While today we would view the same simultaneity of notes (1st chord A) as a seventh chord over a pedal, Rameau took great pains to define the D in the basso continuo, as well as the E and G of the upper part as constituents of the harmonic structure. Rameau implies that there are two different ways of describing the first chord A, that is, by examining it with respect to the basso continuo, or in the context of the fundamental bass. This again indicates to us that Rameau understood well that different reference points would, indeed, lead to different solutions.

The second chord A is what would be described in Rameau's system as a ninth chord over a bass by supposition, which is a third lower than the fundamental bass. The third chord A, however, is very different from the previous two, in that it represents a phenomenon that we would today view as decidedly melodic; it is what Rameau later discusses as a suspension in the 19th Lesson of the *Code*, "Suspensions common to cadences."⁸ Here in the *Traité*, however, it is presented as an eleventh chord, called "heteroclite," in which most of its sounds have been suppressed. While the first and the third chords A seem very different to us, and while the third will later be distinguished in the *Code* as a suspension (which Rameau will attempt to differentiate

⁷Rameau, *Treatise*, xlv.

⁸Rameau, *Code de musique pratique*, in *The Theoretical Writings of Rameau*, vol. 4, ed. Erwin R. Jacobi (n.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1967-1972), 54-55.

from suppositions),⁹ they are both treated by Rameau in this predominantly harmonic framework as different examples of eleventh chords, whose basis is supposition.

Rameau addressed himself specifically to the concept of suspension in the *Génération harmonique* of 1737, written fifteen years after the *Traité*. What is interesting about this chapter, (Chapter XVI) “The Origin of Supposition and Suspension,” is that the concept of suspension now has been isolated and defined, in contrast to the more general treatment in the *Traité*. At the same time Rameau attempts to distinguish *suspension* from *supposition*, an attempt which proves to be problematic:

Supposition takes its source from one of the sounds of the arithmetic proportion, added below the harmonic proportion. Suspension is but a consequence of supposition....¹⁰

The only principal determining this addition is a good melodic line in the *bass*; this is no longer a fundamental bass, but rather the bass popularly called the *continuo*. But, to make sure of a good continuo line the sound, or the bass note, thus added below a dominant should be either the dominant which should follow the first dominant, or the third of this next dominant. Thus, this note by supposition—for that is what the added note should be called—always anticipates its own harmony, by first receiving the harmony of the dominant that may immediately precede it. We say, that may precede it, because, in effect, such a supposition is made only after a principal sound, or after its harmony. Otherwise it is a

⁹Rameau, *Code*, 59.

¹⁰Rameau, *Génération harmonique*, in Deborah Hayes, “Rameau’s Theory of Harmonic Generation: An Annotated Translation and Commentary of *Génération harmonique* by J.-P. Rameau” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1968), 185.

suspension. This must be developed. See Example 23....¹¹

Example 2. Rameau, *Génération*, Example 23.

Continuo bass forming suppositions and suspensions

Fundamental bass

The figures 9 and 4, or 9/4, show chords by supposition, or rather, they show that the notes of the continuo bass are admitted by supposition. Now, here these suppositions occur only after a principal sound. And they are seen to be always a third or a fifth below the dominant in the fundamental bass—the same dominant which, after the principal sound, could have preceded the sound [in the continuo] which anticipates the harmony of the principal sound, or which is replaced by its third. For example, A anticipates the harmony of the principal sound at B, and is a fifth below the dominant, L, which could have preceded it. So also with C, the third of G, which replaces it not only at C but also at D; then C is a third below F, the dominant, which could have preceded in this case....¹²

In regards to the notes H and J, as soon as the leading tone is absent from the harmony of the dominant,

¹¹Rameau, *Génération* (Hayes trans.), 186.

¹²Rameau, *Génération* (Hayes trans.), 187.

which is a fifth above these supposed notes in the continuo, the complete chord is rarely given, because of the exceedingly large number of dissonances which occur in it, greatly increasing its harshness. Thus, as at J, only the fundamental sound is sustained in the harmony—that is, the octave and the seventh of the fundamental sound, adding, if desired, the octave of the note by supposition. Only in the case of H can the harmony be complete.

The notes at J must be regarded as creating a suspension, rather than a supposition.

Suspension consists of keeping as many harmonic sounds as you wish, from one chord, so that they are heard in place of those sounds which should exist in the following chord. Generally, the fundamental sound of the second chord is employed in the continuo bass of the suspension, provided that the sounds can move diatonically to those they suspend, while the fundamental sound of this last chord exists at all times. The suspension is shown in the example of the harmonic sounds, where the octave, 8, remains in order to form the fourth, 4, above J, and thus suspends the third, 3, of the same sound, which remains at K as a fundamental sound, to receive this third, 3.

Suspension has no foundation; its only principle is good taste. However, suspension is derived from dissonance, so that its diatonic succession must be submitted to the succession of the major or minor dissonance which it forms. Suspension must never be abused, any more than supposition; *a good melodic line must guide both of these devices, without seeking them* (italics mine).¹³

In the chapter just cited, Rameau first treats chords by supposition, discussing chords A, C, H and J, all of which correspond with the various descriptions of chords by supposition. He then

¹³Rameau, *Génération* (Hayes trans.), 187-89.

distinguishes chord J “which must be regarded as creating a suspension, rather than a supposition.”¹⁴ The distinction Rameau cites in the text is that “a supposition is made only after a principal sound, or after its harmony. Otherwise it is a suspension.” However, we see from the musical example, that Rameau is attempting to maintain his harmonic point of reference, that is, his concept of supposition, while yet distinguishing the chord J, which he terms a suspension. His criterion for distinguishing the two, however does not coincide with the musical example, as we see that J the suspension, also follows a “principal sound, or... its harmony,” namely the tonic G, exactly as do the other chords by supposition. It is an attempt which Rameau continues in the *Code*, which results in difficulties in regards to the actual musical examples.

In any case, we see several aspects which are later noted in the *Code*, namely, that supposition represents a “genus,” in which is included the “species” suspension. As noted, the text of the *Génération* (but not the musical examples) indicates that supposition follows a principal sound, suggesting that suspension does not, which in the *Code* is modified as, “Supposition always follows the perfect [chord], and suspension that of the dissonant [chord], with the exception that the tonic chord can remain to give that of the six—four to its dominant in the form of suspension.”¹⁵ Rameau’s attempt at an arbitrary way to distinguish supposition and suspension creates a dividing line between the two that is blurred in actual practice, and represents the greatest tension between points of reference which are harmonic-causal and melodic-descriptive.

In the *Code de musique pratique*, a more comprehensive and detailed discussion of suspensions is presented than in any of Rameau’s previous works. The chapters in which Rameau discusses suspension are as follows:

Chapter V (Method for accompanying):

¹⁴Rameau, *Génération* (Hayes trans.), 188.

¹⁵Rameau, *Code*, 59.

Lesson 18. About the chaining of irregular cadences

Lesson 19. Suspension common to cadences

Lesson 21. Suppositions and suspensions

Chapter VII (About the fundamental bass, names and qualities of the notes that are used here, and their succession):

Article XVII. Preparation and resolution of dissonance in which one speaks of suspension, notes that do not count for anything in the harmony, and deceptive cadences and interrupted cadences

Chapter VIII (Means for finding the fundamental bass under a given melody):

9th Means. Licenses, where again it has to do with supposition, suspension, the augmented sixth and syncopation

Chapter XII (Ornamental notes, or notes of musical taste where modulation is again treated)

The context in which Rameau discusses suspensions is very relevant to an understanding of his treatment of the concept. The first three lessons deal with instructions for the keyboard player to accompany, i.e., to realize figured bass. Rameau presents the most practical approach possible, minimizing theoretical and conceptual difficulties.

The two sections from Chapter VII and VIII, however, deal more with fundamental bass theory, and the term *suspension* is therefore treated in a context that is more theoretical.

Finally, in the last excerpt, from Chapter XII, Rameau is again dealing with performance, and his treatment of suspensions is descriptive; in fact, a discussion of “ornamental notes” provides the context of a highly practical and melodic perspective of suspensions.

Excerpt from the 18th Lesson of the *Code*

Rameau makes it quite clear in this lesson from the *Code* that his seemingly new treatment of suspension does not abandon his basic harmonic orientation: “This fourth should be called an eleventh, and it is only for *a more immediate recognition* that I retain the name used

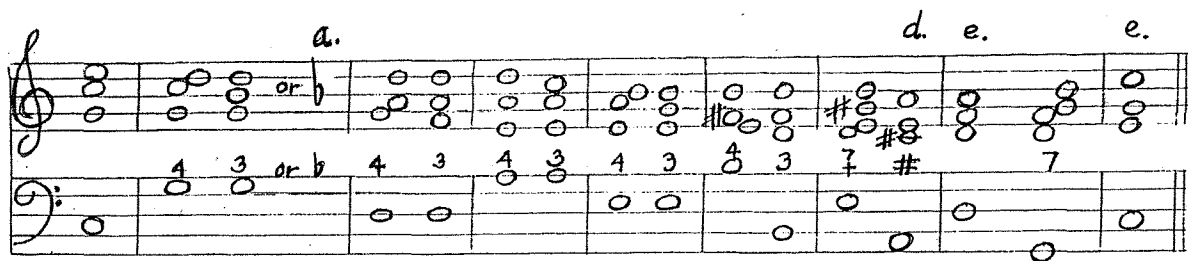
(italics mine).’’¹⁶ In other words, in the context of practical help to keyboard players, Rameau’s approach stresses “immediate recognition,” as opposed to theoretical discourse.

In this excerpt, Rameau presents a sequential passage of suspensions, built on the ascending cycle of fifths, in which a 4–3 suspension is built on each triad in the sequence. In keeping with his “how-to” approach of the *Code*, Rameau presents ways in which the keyboard player can more easily learn and remember the progression.

18th Lesson

About the chaining of irregular cadences

Example 3. Rameau, *Code*, second Example I.



In the second Example I, one passes from tonic to tonic, without any of them being able to give the signal of the subdominant; and therefore the third of each tonic is found to be suspended by the fourth, already occupied by the finger which would have descended naturally to this third; while the two other fingers play the octave and the fifth of the perfect chord through which one would have to pass, the other settles in its place, suspends its motion, in order to descend a moment after on this same third.

One must recognize in this fourth a similar dissonance to that of the chaining of dominants, 7th Lesson, therefore taking the name of the interval that it forms with the bass, but prepared and resolved the same. This fourth should be called an eleventh, and it is only for a more immediate

¹⁶Rameau, *Code*, 53.

recognition that I retain the name used.

To practice this fourth, it is sufficient to retain the octave of the tonic which climbs by a fifth, to make its third descend to its second, according to the usage that one must have made in the cadences, 11th and 14th Lesson; and in place of the rest of the chord, one adds here only the octave of the bass where one passes.

There is another way to suspend the third and the fifth of a bass where one climbs by a fifth, which will be the subject of the following lesson.¹⁷

Excerpt from the 19th Lesson of the *Code*

Earlier, Rameau had made the general categorizations of suspensions in sequences, and cadential suspensions. In this passage, Rameau describes a cadential 4–3 suspension, and begins to differentiate types of suspensions. He cites examples of cadential suspensions which occur “immediately before the perfect cadence,” and those which occur on “the third of the tonic which ends this same cadence.” In other words, Rameau is differentiating those which suspend the notes of the tonic (d), and those which suspend the notes of the dominant (f). In addition, the 6/4 chord (e) is also labelled a suspension by Rameau.

Lesson 19

Suspensions common to cadences

Example 4. Rameau, *Code*, Example K.

¹⁷Rameau, *Code*, 53.

Besides the suspension that I just described in the preceding lesson, one can use another, which consists of retaining the complete perfect chord of a fundamental note on the note a fifth higher; thus, the two fingers which would first have had to descend with this last note to its fifth and its third, descend instead a moment later, either together, or one after the other. (See a, b, c of Example K.)

If the fingers descend one after the other, one passes from the first suspension, called six-four, to that of the four already cited, which is also called four-five.

The finger which descends first is always that which would play the third, so that after having joined its lower neighbor, e, f,¹⁸ it chases it, so to speak, and forces it to then descend, f, g, the same as in the second Example I.

These two suspensions can be employed in succession instead of individually, as in the second Example I, above all in a measure in triple time, as at e, f, g: one or the other, or even both occur frequently immediately before the perfect cadence; they readily announce this cadence, since they simply suspend the dominant harmony which effectively announces it; and often the fourth also suspends the third of the tonic which ends this same cadence, as in the two examples marked d (in Example K). The example shows the three usages.

Everywhere that there are only one or two fingers to slide after a suspension, one can always slide them individually, the connections which embrace the notes in this case show that one can retain the fingers on the same keys without repeating them; furthermore, taste decides.

In the second Example K, one sees the tonic *do* climb to its second, *re* (see a, c), whose seventh chord is the second of the same tonic: now there are just these two

¹⁸Footnote by Rameau: "Since the 4 has no lower neighbor, it is therefore the i which replaces it at e, f."

notes a second apart which remain to form the chord of the fourth adding to it the octave of the bass which supports it; a means which presents itself on all sides to easily find this chord of the fourth under the fingers.

Example 5. Rameau, *Code*, second Example K.

The musical notation consists of two staves, treble and bass. The treble staff contains eight measures of chords, each with a label above it: a., c., d., d., a., b., c., d. Below the treble staff, there are numbers 7, 4, 7, 4, 7, 4, 7, 4, 3, which correspond to the chords. The bass staff contains three measures of chords, each with a label below it: a., b., c. Below the bass staff, there are numbers 7, 4, 7, 4, 7, 4, 7, 4, 3, which correspond to the chords. A line connects the 4 in the treble staff to the 3 in the bass staff, indicating a suspension.

The line which follows a number, thus, ____, signifies that the same interval continues (see e, f of the first Example K). One could use it for as many intervals as remain from one chord to another.

Practice the same example in many other major and minor keys. Enough attention is needed for the bass, for the recognition of the key, and for that of the succession of chords, without again having to pay attention to the arrangement of the fingers, their progression, and the sharps or flats necessary.

Everywhere follow the same given rules for each case, and see that the fingers are so accustomed to it, that no reflection at all is necessary in this case, or in any other.

There are still other suspensions about which I will soon speak; they facilitate practicing chords, and they are of great help in creating a pleasant melody in composition, as well as in improvising.

The 4–3 suspension is used with great frequency in the *Code*, where it is found in many contexts, such as over the dominant triad and over other triads in the cycle of fifths in the second Example I, over the tonic of a major key (d of Example K), and over the tonic of a minor

key (the fifth Example N). It is the same suspension discussed previously in several different contexts, and called "heteroclite" (the third chord in Example III. 90) in the *Traité*, and chord J (Example 23) in the *Génération*. This suspension represents the extent to which Rameau would bend his harmonic conception, referring to the remaining chords in Example 23 as suppositions. In the *Génération*, as well as in Example M in the *Code*, 9 chords and 9/4 chords are consistently called suppositions, and although it is not necessary to do so, they are generally represented as having five different notes, while the four-five suspensions are represented as having three different notes.

Example 6. Rameau, *Code*, Example M.

The musical notation for Example 6, Rameau's *Code*, Example M, is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled 'a.', 'b.', 'c.', and 'c.', shows four measures of music. The first measure (a.) is in C major, with notes C, E, G, B, C in the treble and C, E, G, B, C in the bass. The second measure (b.) is in G major, with notes G, B, D, F#, G in the treble and G, B, D, F#, G in the bass. The third measure (c.) is in D major, with notes D, F#, A, C#, D in the treble and D, F#, A, C#, D in the bass. The fourth measure (c.) is in A major, with notes A, C#, E, G#, A in the treble and A, C#, E, G#, A in the bass. The second system, labeled 'Minor Keys' and 'd.', shows four measures of music. The first measure (d.) is in C minor, with notes C, E♭, G, B♭, C in the treble and C, E♭, G, B♭, C in the bass. The second measure is in G minor, with notes G, B♭, D, F, G in the treble and G, B♭, D, F, G in the bass. The third measure is in D minor, with notes D, F, A, C, D in the treble and D, F, A, C, D in the bass. The fourth measure is in A minor, with notes A, C, E, G, A in the treble and A, C, E, G, A in the bass.

Here there is an editorial point of view that Rameau maintains throughout the musical examples; suppositions could easily also be represented without all their notes, while a four suspension could, theoretically, be represented accompanied by a 9–8 suspension. Rameau, however, is presenting the two concepts in this way in order to justify his fragile distinction between supposition (based on a harmonic perspective) and suspension (based on the melodic perspective of the *Code*).

Excerpt from the 21st Lesson of the *Code*

In this excerpt, Rameau, who has already differentiated between suspensions which resolve to the tonic, and those which resolve to the dominant, now further differentiates the former into 4–3, and 9–8 suspensions. There is a clear logic to Rameau's presentation, from the larger and more general, to the smaller and more specific. He places these suspensions in the context of chord inversions, systematically outlining the various possibilities. The surprising omission of the 6–5 suspension in his treatment will be discussed later.

Rameau clearly creates a genus/species definition in his statement, "Suspension is a type of supposition. However, this is only an ornament, but often pleasant." In addition, the statement is representative of his increasing presentation of suspension as a surface phenomenon, which need not be accounted for in the theory of harmony.

In the third Example M, Rameau describes a chain of overlapping suspensions above a pedal point: 7–6, 6–5, 5–4, 4–3, 3–2, 2–1, and 8–7, a use of suspensions which he had not presented before this lesson. An interesting detail is also Rameau's inclusion of a 6–4 suspension with an added 5th, the first time this variant is included.

Rameau again presents his distinction between supposition and suspension based on the chord which precedes them. This time, however, it is more dogmatic in his use of the word "always." In addition, he makes a subtle shift in noting that supposition follows the "perfect chord," as opposed to the "principal sound" cited in the *Generation*. This rule is consistent with the second Example M, and second Example K, where suspensions all follow a dissonant chord; however, it disagrees with the second Example I and the previous cited Example 23 (in *Génération*), where the suspension also follows the perfect chord. Rameau also notes one exception: the 6–4 suspension may follow the tonic chord.

Lesson 21

Suppositions and suspensions

(Refer to Example 6, above.)

Supposition consists of a bass note placed a third or a fifth below a dominant, as at b in Example M, where there are two different continuo basses with their fundamental basses and where the ajouté [added note] forms the chord of the ninth at b, as well as the added sixth of the tonic *do* which is below, and the seventh of the fundamental bass a third below this tonic.

One recognizes all dominants in the chord itself, where, as fundamental, it is the lowest of the thirds, as well as the highest of the two joined fingers; but with the figured bass numbers it is difficult to make a mistake about supposition, once it is known that it is always formed by the added note, as from letters a to b to which I just referred.

The figures 9 and 9/4 tell you that the chords by supposition are called ninth and nine-four; the bass of the first is the third below a dominant, and that of the second its fifth below, as at c.

The leading tone is often a part of these two chords, giving the first the name augmented seventh, and the other that of augmented fifth, which only occurs in minor keys; the figured bass number indicates this without any possibility of doubt, once it is known how to find a leading tone chord under the fingers, and once the leading tone is known, Lesson VIII.

The augmented seventh is seen in each mode in the last two c's, and the augmented fifth in only the minor mode at d: the first of these two chords can only be built on the tonic, and the second on the mediant.

Suspension is a type of supposition, where sometimes one, two, three, and even four fingers remain on the same keys, before gliding to the chord that the bass would require first according to the rules of the regulation of the mechanism; moreover, this is only an ornament, but often pleasant, to which the fingers must be accustomed through frequent exercise in different keys, as well as the ear,

which is delighted once it knows ahead of time all the places where this is possible, as at b, d, e, f of Example K.

There are two arbitrary suspensions on the tonic after its leading note chord, that is, its third suspended by a fourth, which is already known, and its octave suspended by a ninth, where it simply concerns an arbitrary movement between two fingers of which one or the other descends alone, and of which the leading tone must always be removed, seeing that one uses only the same three fingers which then form the perfect chord of the tonic, a, b, and k, l of the second Example M.

Example 7. Rameau, *Code*, second Example M.

The musical notation for Example 7 consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two staves (treble and bass) with notes and fingerings. The notes are labeled with letters a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l. The fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-7. The notation shows various suspensions and movements between chords. The second system also has two staves with notes labeled m, n, o, p, q, r and fingerings indicated by numbers 1-7. The notation shows further suspensions and movements between chords.

Notice the same leading tone chord at the first a and at i, where the difference of the suspensions that follow it consists of making the second descend at the second a, in order to suspend the third b, and, on the contrary, to make the fourth k descend in order to suspend the octave l; the same three fingers that formed these two suspensions then form the perfect chord that should have first followed the leading tone.

From the moment that one can foresee these types of suspensions, it is necessary to try to place the leading tone

in the middle of its chord, as at the first *a* and at *i*, avoiding rules that are contrary, according to which the entrenchment of the leading tone strongly disrupts that of the mechanism.

Sometimes, but very rarely, these two suspensions are reversed, on the third or on the fifth of a tonic, whose figured bass number could appear unintelligible, if it had not been expected. However, since it is certain that the chord of the tonic must follow the leading tone, it must be concluded from the unintelligible figured bass numbers that it can be nothing other than a suspension, except to distinguish here the two which concern only the tonic, since in practice it is absolutely the same.

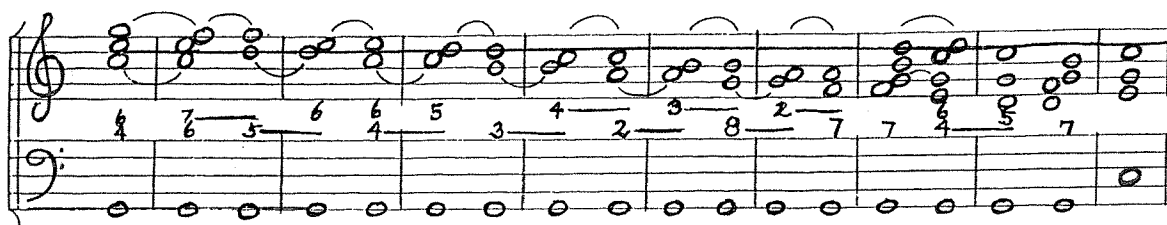
Look at 9–6 on a mediant *d*, or 7–4 on a dominant *g*, after the leading tone chord, which is none other than the fourth which forms the suspension on the third which would have to follow in the perfect chord of their tonic: notice, in the same way, 7 on this mediant *n*, or 6–5 on this dominant *q*, always after the leading tone chord, which again is nothing other than the ninth forming the suspension of the octave which would first have to follow in the perfect chord of their tonic, (the second Example M, where *c*, *d*, *e*, and *f*, *g*, *h*, give the inversion of *a*, *a*, *b* and where *m*, *n*, *o*, and *p*, *q*, *r*, provide that of *i*, *k*, *l*).

As the tonic chord always follows these kinds of suspensions, and since it must follow the leading tone, are we in an embarrassing position here? If we retain the same leading tone, we will almost always be in agreement with the composer here, above all if it is only made up of two or three parts. See Chapter XII and the third Example R in the composition example.

Let us accustom ourselves from the beginning, to have each finger descend in its rank one after the other, beginning with the dissonance, if not with the third, and soon we will put all suspensions to the test; there will rarely be more than two fingers which have to descend in

this way, and if there should be a third, its position would carry it by the rules, without one having to think about it.

Example 8. Rameau, *Code*, third Example M.



The dissonance which goes to join its neighbor note makes it dissonant in its turn, thus, from one to the next; although if, for example, in an organ point, where a succession of figured bass numbers that do not correspond at all to that of the cadences could be found over the same bass note, one would be content therefore with the two fingers, of which the highest would set out, so to speak, the other joining it; and one would continue so, until, approaching the end, the possibility of the complete harmony would be seen, (the third Example M), where, unusually, the fifth descending first to join its neighbor.

The suspension is nothing more, basically, than a game of fingers, adding sounds or notes by supposition where those which would have to descend together setting out one after the other in joining them. Supposition always follows the perfect chord, and suspension that of the dissonant [chord], with the exception that the tonic chord can remain to give that of the six-four to its dominant in the form of a suspension. See more on this subject in Lesson XXV.¹⁹

Rameau, in this short excerpt, notes that, in suspension,

¹⁹Rameau, *Code*, 98.

“supposition often takes place.”²⁰ This seems to imply a refinement of his genus/species presentation of supposition and suspension, and clearly suggests that not all suspensions are a result of supposition.

He discusses the 9–8 suspension which he had cited previously; however, as a subtle variation, he presents the 9–8 and 4–3 suspensions in the context of deceptive cadence resolutions.

Article 27

Preparation and resolution of dissonance, in which one speaks of suspension, the notes that do not count for anything in the harmony, and deceptive cadences and interrupted cadences

Example 9. Rameau, *Code*, second Example C.

The musical notation for Example 9 consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various notes, rests, and accidentals, with some notes marked with '7' and '9' indicating suspension or dissonance. The bottom staff is labeled 'B.C.' and 'B.F.'

Let us add to this remark that it is sufficient that the desired consonance over a fundamental bass be that of another fundamental bass brought about by a legitimate succession, for the effect to always be agreeable; this can be brought about only by suspension, in which supposition often takes place: also, we see at q of the second example C, the octave of the tonic *do* in the basso continuo suspended by the ninth, resolves on the third of the fundamental bass *r* just as the fourth of the tonic *s*, resolves on the fifth of the fundamental bass *t* which is also the basso continuo and which would have formed the third of

²⁰Rameau, *Code*, 97.

the note s of this basso continuo if the note s had continued.²¹

When a dominant announces a cadence, and when this announcement can be suspended by a fourth and a sixth, or a fourth and a fifth, and when the third of the tonic, or the supposed tonic, can be suspended as well by the fourth, provided that the suspended consonances do not appear at the same time in any part, it is always successful: as for the rest, it is up to taste to decide. Look at example K of the Lesson XIX, it is full of all of these suspensions.

Excerpt from the 9th Means

In this excerpt from the 9th Means, or Manner, Rameau describes some types of suspensions which include, for example, suspensions of a bass and its seventh, where the inner voices move (third Example N), and suspensions of the melody, where the bass moves.

As mentioned, it is as a means of avoiding the inherent tension caused by the opposition of a harmonic/causal perspective and a melodic/descriptive one, that Rameau attempts to focus on another way of distinguishing supposition and suspension. As a variant of this definition, he writes:

Notice the difference between suspension and supposition; the latter always receives the dissonance prepared by a consonance, the former, on the contrary, receives its dissonance from the same dissonance which precedes it, with the exception of a 6—4 on a dominant.²²

This is similar to the difference cited in the *Génération*, that is, that suppositions follow a "principal sound, or... its harmony," while suspensions do not. Here, in the *Code*, Rameau again qualifies it by noting that suspensions may follow the 6/4 chord, and this occurs in a

²¹Rameau, *Code*, 129.

²²Rameau, *Code*, 127.

majority of the musical examples. However, just as chord J in Example 23 in the *Génération* did not conform to this guideline, other examples in the *Code* do not as well: the suspensions of the second Example I (which I cited previously) and the supposition d in Example M.

Excerpt from the 9th Mean

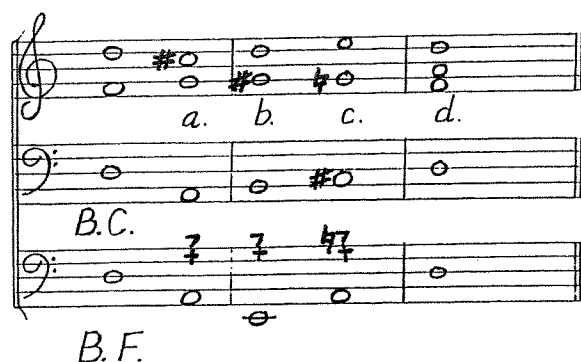
Licenses, where it again has to do with supposition, suspension, the augmented sixth and syncopation

Example 10. Rameau, *Code*, third Example N.

The musical notation consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with notes a, b, c, d. Above the note c is a '+' sign. The middle staff is a bass clef with notes a, b, c, d. The bottom staff is a figured bass staff with figures 7, 6-5, 7. The middle staff is labeled 'B.C.' and the bottom staff is labeled 'B.F.'.

More than one musician, seduced by the duration of a note here, which suspends only the harmony of a dominant in the basso continuo and reappears immediately afterwards, provides figured bass numbers in a way that shows no understanding, for example, 7–6 on the mediant b of the third Example N, where the same dissonance is seen to continue throughout a, b, c and resolve only at d. Now, if the same dissonance continues, as a consequence, the same fundamental bass remains. Why, therefore, change the harmony in its course, or at least appear to want to disfigure it!

This is, then, the feeling that one has, if it is not that of dissonance, about which one is always preoccupied until it is resolved! The desire for such a resolution is the sole object of the ear in this case.

Example 12. Rameau, *Code*, seventh Example N.

The seventh Example N proves that this license can take place even over a dominant, followed by its own [dominant] as a result of chromaticism, where we see that the notes a, b, c of the second part from the top, supposedly being the same since they only change the genre here, the dissonance at a, b, c consequently is found resolved at d while the leading tone a of the first part from the top ascends to b, as it must, and while that of the second part from the top descends chromatically to c. We just saw a suspension rather similar to this between a, b, c, d in the third Example N.²⁴

I hardly see any real licenses other than suspensions, in which good taste in the melody [a good melodic line] is certainly the origin: all the others are found to be permitted in one way or another. Indeed, one places a trill on a higher note, and a *port de voix* on a lower one which are not, in either case, based on harmonic reasons, and it is exactly in these sorts of cases that, in order to agree with the melody, the fall of the dissonance is suspended. From there as much as possible has been presumed everywhere,

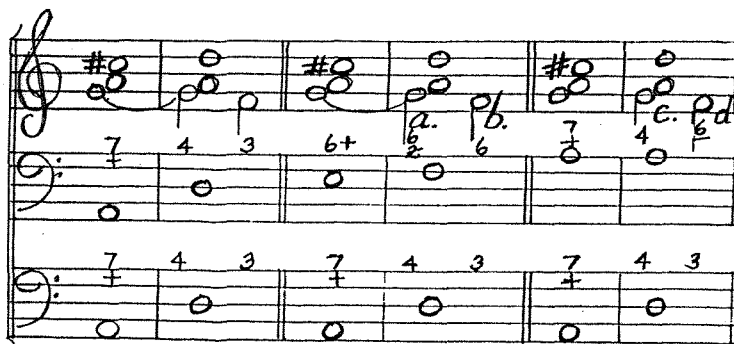
²⁴Rameau, *Code*, 127.

and, as I already noted (in the 23rd Lesson), all the notes of a chord of the seventh in a chain of dominants can be suspended, where the fundamental bass would therefore descend continually by thirds. There would be even more of the suspensions of the ninth on a tonic preceded by its leading tone chord, that is to say, by its dominant; but the harmonic progression does not have anything to do with suspension, where although a fundamental bass exists, one retains its principal basis of harmony, that is to say, at least this fundamental bass and the seventh. We see clearly, as we feel, that it is only a simple delaying of a desired effect, in a word, of a simple suspension in which one must always dispense with looking for the fundamental bass.

It is a good idea to advise you that the suspension of the 4th above a tonic preceded by its leading tone chord can occur on its mediant and its dominant, when, after a similar leading tone chord, good taste in the melody of the basso continuo requires that the mediant on this dominant be used in place of their tonic; this is so that the same chord of the fourth which would be placed on this tonic could act on its mediant, thus forming its sixth, its third and its ninth, or on its dominant, forming its octave, its seventh and its fourth. But as harmony never offers the same intervals together, there is something that has given me the idea of crossing the figured bass number with a horizontal line which, in the third Example N, suspends the consonance. In Lesson 21, the example of a similar inversion of the suspension of the ninth on the tonic is found.

A certain diatonic progression of perfect chords inverted into chords of the sixth, mentioned in Lesson 24, must also be included among licenses, in that it does not have any connections at all; it is however, very agreeable in three parts as long as the fifths that follow from this inversion are avoided.²⁵

²⁵Rameau, *Code*, 128.

Example 13. Rameau, *Code*, fifth Example N.

Notice the difference between suspension and supposition; the latter always receives the dissonance prepared by a consonance, the former, on the contrary, receives its dissonance from the same dissonance which precedes it, with the exception of a 6–4 on a dominant, where the chord of its tonic is supposed to repeat itself, although it can be used when desired in place of the 5–4, where the fundamental bass would therefore be syncopated: all this, not to mention these imaginative suspensions that I just cited.

There are imaginative syncopations on all the notes of the same chord, where each part equally can be syncopated; this does not need examples, since the harmony never varies here at all.²⁶

Excerpt from Chapter 12 of the *Code*

It is noteworthy that, while Rameau presents both 4–3 and 9–8 suspensions with inversions (in the previously cited second Example M), he conspicuously avoids the 6–5 suspension, including it only as part of the 6/4-chord suspension. The only prior example of a 6–5 suspension cited by Rameau is that in the third Example M previously mentioned, at the beginning of a chain of suspensions over a dominant pedal in which every degree of the scale is suspended and then

²⁶Rameau, *Code*, 129.

resolved. In addition, Rameau overlooks the 6–5 suspension in the text, until this excerpt when he terms it “an unusual suspension,” and proceeds to try to explain it away by viewing it from the point of view of the relative minor, noting that it would then be a fourth suspension. This lack of attention to the 6–5 suspension can be attributed to Rameau’s desire to avoid these notes, which would interfere with his presentation of suspension as “derived from dissonance,”²⁷ because, as Rameau notes in this excerpt, the sixth is consonant.

An important aspect repeated in the *Code* is Rameau’s description of the tonic 6/4-chord as a suspension. It can be seen as an example of a permissible ambiguity in his system (another example being that of the renowned *double emploi*), as the 6/4 chord had been described in the *Traité* as the second inversion of the perfect (tonic) chord (6:8:10).

Later, when Rameau writes about the third Example R,

It is clear that the first of the two black notes of the melody on the same degree a, b, is purely from taste²⁸

the choice of which of the two notes is harmonic, and which is non-harmonic depends on the point of view, either by regarding the basso continuo, or the fundamental bass; Rameau is consistent with his approach in the *Traité*, in which he implied that alternative perspectives would produce alternative solutions. In a sense, the choice of which notes are harmonic, and which are non-harmonic in this example, provides a musical equivalent of an optical illusion, where a conflict is produced by the subsequent recognition of contrasting images. However, the general sense of this excerpt is a “lightening up” of the basic conflict between harmonic and melodic approaches; Rameau indicates that many aspects of music are “ornamental,” and not to be treated so seriously, i.e., from a harmonic/causal point of view.

²⁷Rameau, *Génération* (Hayes trans.), 188-89.

²⁸Rameau, *Code*, 155.

Excerpt from Chapter 12 of the *Code*

Ornamental notes or notes of musical taste, where modulation is again treated

Example 14. Rameau, *Code*, third Example R.²⁹

Handwritten musical score for "The Alphabet Song" in 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves are vocal parts (Soprano and Alto), and the last two are piano accompaniment (Right and Left Hand). The melody is written in treble clef for the vocal parts and bass clef for the piano parts. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked "Allegretto". The lyrics are written below the notes, with some letters in italics. The piano accompaniment includes fingerings and dynamics like "2ND D." and "B.C.". The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Allegretto

2/4

a. b. a. b. a. b. e. f. g. h. i. k. l. m.

2ND D. *a. b.*

B.C. *c. d.*

B.F. *4 l. m.*

[illegible]

We are now going to mix notes of taste with suspensions formed in part by supposition, in different

²⁹It is interesting to note that, in this musical example, Rameau has confused the notes of the basso continuo and the fundamental bass. In the second measure, for example, we see that the basso continuo, which is the bass by supposition a fifth below the fundamental bass, must be C, and not G. In addition, Rameau writes in this excerpt about the “care that must be taken not to syncopate the B. F. [fundamental bass] at all”; and we see in this example that what is marked B. F. *is* syncopated.

cadences elaborated by imitations and by designs [i.e., motivic connections], from which one can gain new insights. The same melody given in duple and triple meter in this third Example R, is to help you recognize that every melodic idea can be transferred from one meter to the other, in placing, on one hand, the harmonic notes in the same beat of the measure where the others are found, and in augmenting or diminishing the number of notes of taste in proportion to the beat.

Whatever the number of notes that are employed in one, two, or three and four beats of the measure, the same fundamental bass can always continue here, as long as it can receive in its harmony one of the two notes that will be found here a second apart; let be it understood, however, that it will not be forced to change here, in order to follow its legitimate route.

It is clear that the first of the two quarter notes of the melody on the same degree a, b, is purely from taste, since the fundamental bass would have to be syncopated; and if it is syncopated at the reference mark of the last c, that is only to indicate the suspension of the note itself placed above this reference mark, as that is equally found in the beginning of the basso continuo over the notes c, d of the fundamental bass suspension correctly indicated by the *guidons* [reference marks] of the fundamental bass under these same notes c, d.

An unusual suspension of the fifth f by the sixth e is formed at e, f, which would be quite simple [to understand] according to the reference marks of the basso continuo where the note b of the melody, divided into two equal values, would receive two dominants, the last of which would pass to its tonic e, receiving the suspension of the fourth; but wanting to avoid monotony, I take advantage of the possibility of allowing in the minor mode that which appears to be of natural law in its relative major. Look at the second quarter note of the second part from the top

under the third b; although it is the leading tone of the major key, isn't it also supertonic of its relative minor? Could it not enjoy the right of the added sixth as well as that of the leading tone, since it climbs diatonically? Doesn't the subdominant, which receives it in its harmony, find the fifth of its tonic at f in order to pass here? And, according to the spirit of the melody, isn't the quarter note e a suspension in the minor mode as well as in the major? Also the sixth, although consonant, becomes a suspension of the fifth here, as it should have been of the third in the major mode, forming the fourth at the *guidon* [reference mark] of the basso continuo.

The dominant of the major key can be placed under e, or even under the second half of the whole note b, to then form a suspension on its tonic. Now, as all the spirit of the melody rests on the suspensions until there, it is up to the composer to hear and to judge what is most suitable, also in regards to monotony.

As for the rest, if here only the fifth is suspended by the sixth, at the same time the third can be suspended by the fourth and the second, that is to say that the chord of the tonic c could be suspended by the complete chord which precedes it, either as leading tone in the major key, or as *ajouté* [added note] in the minor, which the second part from the top would therefore go along with, retaining the same note from b to e; this is an intermediary which could take place in all suspensions where the fourth can suspend the third of a tonic.

The perfect cadence simply imitated from l to m in the fundamental bass is only a consequence of the license cited in the 9th Method.

The same kind of melody at c, d, as at a, b, where d resolves the suspensions c, just as b resolves the suspensions a; suspensions which are born, in part, of supposition.

These same suspensions can form chords of 5/4 or

6/4 everywhere, as you wish.

The basso continuo can imitate the melody from p to q, here repeating the note indicated with the *guidon* [reference mark]: this same melody is doubled from r to s and tripled from q to r: here the second part from the top is imitated in a manner that could be varied in many ways, either by the varied succession of the notes which make up the fundamental bass, or by the multiplication or diminution of the notes, sometimes here, sometimes there.

One can make the basso continuo which forms a deceptive cadence at s dominant, in accordance with the basso continuo, or tonic according to the fundamental bass. Here *double emploi* [double employment] is evident; if the subdominant is the fundamental bass in the fundamental bass at t, by contrast, the supertonic is in the basso continuo so that the 6/4 chord, which then leads to the dominant u, simply suspends its seventh chord x, which could have appeared first after t with a new melody.

Notice notes a, b, c, d, and k, l, m, n of the fourth example R, the different fundamental basses that can tolerate the melody c, d of the third Example R, and notice the variety that they can give to the parts which accompany this melody. If in the third Example R suspensions of the fourth are found at all the c's, here it is the six-four suspension at k, then that of the augmented seventh at n; while if the suspension of the d's in the third Example R is that of a fourth, here it is a ninth, so that the leading tone chord used on one hand cannot be used in the other.

If you examine the fundamental bass notes f, g, h, you will see that they must each have a fundamental bass, not being able to arrive at the tonic which the mediant g demands, making its dominant f precede it, which must reappear at h for the same reason. In a rapid movement, however, f and g could pass because of reasons of taste in

Example 15. Rameau, *Code*, fourth Example R.

Handwritten musical score for "The Rose Tree" in 3/4 time. The score is written on four staves. The first two staves are for the vocal melody, and the last two are for the piano accompaniment. The melody includes lyrics "a. b. c. d." and "e. f. g. h. i. k. l. m. n." with various musical notations like notes, rests, and accidentals. The piano part includes chords and fingerings.

the melody, waiting for h to give it the leading tone chord that follows by right that of the second.

It is again necessary to mention here that in place of the *double emploi*, the harmony of the supertonic e in the fundamental bass, similar to that of the sub-dominant in the basso continuo, can suppose this sub-dominant; from which an irregular cadence is born from e to g, the effect of which can only be very good, and which depends on the composer.

If the melody forcibly leads to the note i, the octave formed with the basso continuo, although formed by ascending evenly, can only be agreeable thanks to the melody of this basso continuo, otherwise one can substitute the note indicated by the *guidon* [reference mark] for the note i of the melody.

Notice, finally, that the suspension of the fourth, given to the penultimate c of the third Example R, is a bit daring, considering that it is accompanied here by the false

fifth, instead of the fifth; this, however, is necessary, since one wants to retain the sense of the governing key here, which occurs beforehand and continues immediately afterwards.

I don't see how, after such examples, that one can go wrong in regards to notes of good taste, in adding here the following reflections.³⁰

As noted previously, Shirlaw wrote that, as a result of Rameau's use of suspensions in the *Code*, his theory "undergoes a change for the better; but he does not observe that he completely demolishes his own theory of Supposition." In fact, Rameau, perhaps aware of the tension created between the harmonic view of supposition, and the melodic view of suspension, held to an arbitrary distinction between the two. Rameau was willing to bend, in admitting suspension into his theory, but he was not willing to alter the harmonic framework which was the cornerstone of his theory. It was precisely by not acknowledging the continual tension created by the two perspectives which are interwoven in the *Traité*, *Génération*, and the *Code* that Rameau was constrained to make an arbitrary division between supposition and suspension, an unsatisfactory distinction which has little usefulness in its application to the actual musical surface.

³⁰Rameau, *Code*, 154-57.